

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION WALKS OUT DURING DEBATE
ON DRAFT CONSTITUTION

1. SUMMARY. THE PARLIAMENTARY HAS BEEN CONSIDERING THIS WEEK THE LAST REMAINING ARTICLES OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION, WHICH DEAL WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC. DEBATE DURING THE FIRST TWO DAYS WAS FAIRLY RESTRAINED, ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION DEPUTIES HAVE BEEN UNHAPPY OVER THEIR INABILITY TO AMEND SOME OF THE KEY PROVISIONS CONCERNING PRESIDENTIAL POWERS. THE NIGHT OF MAY 21 ALL OPPOSITION DEPUTIES STAGED A WALKOUT WHEN THE PRO-CARAMANLIS MAJORITY REJECTED A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO ARTICLE 32 ON THE ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT. THE OPPOSITION DEPUTIES APPARENTLY INTEND TO BOYCOTT THE FEW REMAINING DAYS OF DEBATE AND VOTING ON THE CONSTITUTION, BUT WILL REPORTEDLY RETURN TO THE CHAMBER TO CONDUCT OTHER BUSINESS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT SINCE EARLY JANUARY, UNDER STUDY IN VARIOUS SUBCOMMITTEES AND, BEGINNING ON MARCH 31, IN INTENSIVE FULL PLENARY DEBATE ARTICLE BY ARTICLE. TWENTY ONE OF THE 112 ARTICLES IN THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION DEAL WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE

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REPUBLIC (ARTICLES 30 THRU 50). THESE ARTICLES WERE

LEFT TO BE CONSIDERED LAST. ON MAY 19 PARLIAMENT
BEGAN CONSIDERATION OF THESE ARTICLES.

3. THE DEBATE DURING THE FIRST TWO SESSIONS WAS
MEASURED EVEN THOUGH THE OPPOSITION HAS HUFFED AND PUFFED
FOR WEEKS AGAINST THE CONCEPTUAL SCHEME OF THE PRESIDENCY,
MANY OF ITS PREROGATIVES, AND BECAUSE OF THE OPPOSITIONS
FEARS AND DOUBTS REGARDING CARAMANLIS INTENTION TO FILL
THE OFFICE. ONE POINT AT ISSUE WAS WHETHER THE PRESIDENT
SHOULD BE ELECTED BY THE PARLIAMENT AS PROVIDED BY
ARTICLE 30 OR BY THE PEOPLE AS THE OPPOSITION PREFERRED.
ON MAY 20, HOWEVER, ARTICLE 30 WAS ADOPTED WITHOUT
AMENDMENT.

4. THE POSSIBILITY THE OPPOSITION MIGHT REFUSE TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE DEBATE ON THE ARTICLES CONCERNING
THE PRESIDENT HAD BEEN MENTIONED BEFORE THE DEBATE
BEGAN. HOWEVER, THE OPPOSITION JOINED IN THE DEBATE
WHICH, AS NOTED ABOVE, WAS MODERATE AND RESTRAINED
DURING THE FIRST TWO SESSIONS MAY 19 AND 20. DURING
THE DEBATE THE NIGHT OF MAY 21, HOWEVER, ON ARTICLE 32,
CU/NF LEADER MAVROS REPEATED ONCE MORE THE LONG STANDING
OPPOSITION GRIEVANCE AGAINST THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTED
BY THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY BY ACCUSING THE PARLIAMENTARY
MAJORITY OF EXPLOITING ITS POWER TO IMPOSE AN
"UNDEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION" AND TO ESTABLISH A PRESIDENCY
WITH "MONARCHICAL POWERS." MAVROS THEN LED A WALKOUT OF
ALL OPPOSITION DEPUTIES IN THE CHAMBER (SOME 70 LAST NIGHT).

5. ARTICLE 32 SEEMED TO BE THE OCCASION RATHER THAN THE
REASON FOR THE DRAMATIC MOVE. THE ARTICLE PROPOSES THAT IN
CASE OF RESIGNATION OR DEATH OF THE PRES-
IDENT, HIS SUCCESSOR WILL BE ELECTED FOR A FULL
FIVE-YEAR TERM. THE OPPOSITION ARGUED THAT THE SUCCESSOR
SHOULD BE ELECTED ONLY TO FILL THE BALANCE OF THE
UNEXPIRED TERM. ITS PROPOSED AMENDMENT ALONG THESE LINES
WAS NOT ACCEPTED BY THE MAJORITY AND THE WALKOUT TOOK
PLACE. THE MAJORITY THEN PASSED ARTICLE 32.

6. NINE ARTICLES ON THE PRESIDENT REMAIN TO BE CONSIDERED
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(ARTICLES 37, 39, 40-44, 48-49). AFTER THESE ARTICLES ARE
ADOPTED, THE PARLIAMENT, WE UNDERSTAND, WILL THEN HAVE TO
HAVE ONE FINAL OVERALL VOTE ADOPTING THE CONSTITUTION AS A
WHOLE. THIS IS SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE ON MAY 27.
MEANWHILE, EFFORTS TO CONVINCE THE OPPOSITION TO END ITS
WALKOUT AND RESUME PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSIDERATION OF
THE CONSTITUTION WILL CONTINUE. ACCORDING TO A MEMBER
OF THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER,

THE MAJORITY WILL PROCEED TO COMPLETE ADOPTION OF THE
CONSTITUTION WHETHER THE OPPOSITION RETURNS TO THE
FLOOR OR NOT.
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